

COUNTY MANAGERS VOLUNTEER FORUM

March 24, 2009

Successful Strategies, Challenges and Solutions for Volunteer Recruitment, Retention, Management, Recognition and Using Technology

Recommendations from Roundtable Discussion

RECRUITMENT

Successful Strategies/Approaches

- Use of internet (web presence), Volunteer Fairfax
- Word of mouth (volunteers who enjoy their experience are walking advertisements)
- Good question to ask yourself is what do you need in a volunteer (what are you looking for)?
- Faith-based organizations are a good source
- GMU (New Century College) has students looking to fulfill service hours
- Community Service Organizations (like Boy Scouts) need opportunities to serve
- Make it an enjoyable/satisfying experience to your volunteers and word will get out
- Put signs in your facility (like Park Authority), post on bulletin board at Starbucks, use Craig's list and scan for people looking for opportunities to volunteer
- Reel in via a fun activity and then offer volunteer sign-ups
- Go to social work departments at universities (like Mary Mount)
- Highlight fact that volunteers gain by learning how to narrow down career interests
- Golden Gazette, Beacon News, Courier, Fairfax Newslink newsletters
- Use Volunteer Match
- Send e-mails to volunteer banks
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Challenges/Solutions

- Losing staff and not being able to oversee volunteers
- Physically demanding work (book shelving)
- Keeping volunteers on long-term projects
- Recruiting specific demographics (African American and Hispanic men)
- Due Diligence (criminal background checks)= time/money
- Logistics (transporting in private cars)
- Keeping people who are in job search mode after they find paying jobs

- Training costs/investments to train volunteers who then leave
 - Solution: Brief/interview candidate about the volunteer opportunity prior to training. Give them access to actual volunteers who can speak to real issues
- Training volunteers requires huge amounts of staff time
 - Solution: Have other volunteers train, coordinate training and invite guest speakers
- Need Volunteers to commit long term projects (but 1 year commitments are scary for them)
 - Solution: Try to get commitment for 1 school year, with extensions for summer coverage
 - Give a variety of experiences (not just grunt work).
 - Figure out what motivates potential volunteer (what drives them), then structure the experience accordingly
 - For those out of work, highlight the mental health benefits of volunteering
 - Use technology (like Skype) to keep volunteers visually connected while they work phone lines remotely
- 2. Staff time consumption in meeting with potential volunteers (who often cancel appointments)

Solutions

- Go to GMU/NOVA student service learning personnel and attend campus festivals to promote your volunteer opportunities
- Spend time learning how to define the benefits that your volunteers reap by participating in your programs
- Take advantage of availability of court-ordered community service programs
- Take advantage of New Century College (GMU) interns availability
- Let volunteers tag-team/buddy-up when doing mentoring programs
- Buy your own buses, get public transportation subsidies, have corporations donate their public transport subsidies or commuter trams
- Have a centralized location/database of security clearances for potential volunteers (to avoid paperwork on background checks) so that each individual CBO avoids the time they would otherwise have to expend.
- Have veteran volunteers conduct screening of new volunteers
- Have new volunteers shadow experienced volunteers
- Conduct training for volunteers on-line before they start (rather than have your staff expend time)
- Construct a centralized warehouse of “shovel ready” volunteers who can provide basic administrative tasks that are common among all CBOs (they can be rotated to fill administrative gaps at different times)
- Create a way to redirect volunteers to more appropriate CBOs when they arrive at a volunteer opportunity that does not really match their ability or interest area

- Create a systemic way to use Court Appointed volunteers
- Continue to provide roundtables where volunteer coordinators can keep sharing knowledge

RETAINING, MANAGING VOLUNTEERS AND CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

Successful Strategies/Approaches

Managing Volunteers

- Use Emails (mass emails)
- Keep contact via personal phone calls
- Newsletters
- Website
- Friends of VAN (creating their own social network)
- Providing trainings to volunteers
- In-house orientation
- Code of conduct for volunteers
- Recognizing volunteers
- Read “Walk Awhile in My Shoes” by Eric Harvey and Steve Venture—an excellent read on the perspective of both the manager and the employee
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Retention

- Provide certificates for recognition
- Personal interest in the volunteers
- Send Ecards available free from Hallmark.com
- Host potlucks and other social and family events
- Participate in Volunteer Fairfax’s annual recognition event

Challenges

Challenges for Managers

- Motivation to take the program further
- Budget to run the program
- Volunteer program being placed on the back burner
- Can’t share checks across agencies
- Vacant positions
- Volunteers are not “free”
- Restrictive hours
- Lack of time
- Too hard on ourselves
- Lack of understanding among upper management

Challenges with Retention

- Budget

- Students & retirees moving
- Burn out
- Bad management experience
- Putting them in the right place
- Personality
- Distance for travel in the county
- Unemployment
- Volunteer's personal life stressors
- Scheduling/conflicts with schedules
- Knowledge of other county programs to coordinate and/or share resources, volunteers
- Making connections with staff/clients

Solutions

- To enhance the budget-plan fundraising events, find low cost events to have for the volunteers celebrate their accomplishments
- To improve scheduling-be flexible, plan way in advance, consider non-traditional scheduling approaches (less of a commitment to extensive schedule), do not require minimum hours
- To engage volunteers-have them serve on committees when there is seasonal/or downtime in volunteer demands, offer them other positions, rotate volunteers in new experiences, give them a history project, let them do public speaking and/or advocate on behalf of your agency for your agency director, public, for recruitment and to Board of Supervisors
- Consider using volunteers as “supervisors” especially those with good experience or long-term commitment
- To improve resources/placement of volunteers-create a centralized database of resources, gain knowledge of other county agencies and volunteer opportunities & internships, coordinate more fully with other county agencies, push for a central paid volunteer coordinator for the county

Criminal Background Checks

-approach varies from agency to agency
 -cost/type of check/use of services to conduct checks varies from agency to agency
 -there is no common county policy
 -needs to be repeated for each experience, creates overlap and unnecessary expense for individual agencies

RECOGNITION

Successful Strategies/Approaches

- Court – large annual luncheon (150 volunteers – 135 of whom are regular) where give out personalized gifts for milestone awards (5-10-15-20-25-30 years) and volunteer of the year. Also a small gift for every volunteer. Held at juvenile detention center with food by its chef in April – 100 attend. Also give out certificates. Excellent dbase for keeping track of hours.
- Volunteer Interpreters for court – Constant communication via emails, calls and newsletter.
- Volunteer Fairfax - Use Volunteer Report for statistics. Let each vol. know how many hours for tax purposes. Benchmark hours not years. Send names for awards up the pipeline.
- Medical Reserve Corps – Send out New Years' greeting. Submit for awards to higher up levels.
- Parks – One weekday evening in August have big outdoor bash at a park that includes families (300 attend). During Volunteer week individual sites hold smaller events (breakfast, lunches). In Fall give out Ellie Doyle Award for volunteer of year at big gala at Waterford (200 attend). Have small quarterly recognitions.
- Library – In April have those with 1,000 hours service come before library board with reception held at Mason Regional Library. Each branch also does its own with small gifts. Send out birthday cards. Friends of Library are brought before Board of Supervisors. Newsletter.
- VAN – Nominate for outside awards
- Long Term Care – Tea for 55 volunteers.
- CRS – Yearly adult breakfast for 300 at Waterford (100 hours). Teens (about 200) recognized at celebration at government Center.
- Prevention, CYR, CPS – Banquet with food donated and staff cooks – 200 attend.
- SkillSource – Luncheon for 200 CASH volunteers funded by IRS and United Way.
- Aging – 2,200 volunteers they send birthday cards to
- Everyone does certificates. CRS does inexpensive wooden plaques.

Challenges/Solutions

1. Logistics – with so many volunteers it's hard to coordinate schedules and find a big enough location.
 - Send teabag in card and say "Have a cup of tea on me."
2. Funding
 - Get donations
 - Do potluck
 - Send e-cards

3. Many volunteers don't want recognition. They do it from the heart and they don't want taxpayers \$ spent to reward them.
 - Ask volunteers how they'd like to be recognized.
 - Explain that event helps build a sense of community.
 - Call it a party not a ceremony.
 - Have activity for them to work on while celebrating (i.e. making toys for animal shelter).
4. Large number of volunteers makes it hard to make things personal and meaningful.
 - Personal recognition by person directly working with.
 - Look for state awards and competitive training programs for volunteers.

USING TECHNOLOGY

Successful Strategies/Approaches

AAA – web based application for volunteers

Highlights – Application holding “tank”

Position descriptions

Data entry by prospective volunteer applicants

Web based

Allows internal review

Just a click to enter volunteers file

Replaced paper and need for data entry

Option to follow-up with volunteer

Great for sending out newsletter to volunteers in registry

Web based is very accessible

Volunteer Solution

Auto reply to applicant

Indicator of status for follow-up

JDR and Park Authority Application

Tracking volunteer experience –

Volunteer Reporter

Allows reports from sites to HQ – used to take two days to enter info
live data – online

Universal access – all staff can see info

GIS – helps map volunteers for assignment and to develop outreach plan
and deciding on training needs and for disaster response.

Challenges

- Too many points of entry for prospective volunteers
- No common data base for volunteers
- Background checks are different for each agency
- Places we check are the same, DMV, Criminal, and Child Abuse
- Background checks take a long time
- Volunteer management – inconsistencies between agencies
- Agencies have different administrative needs – they think
- No combined report of all the volunteer hours and services – very fragmented
- Can't share volunteer information between programs for some reason
 - Suspect that volunteers get lost between agencies
 - Turf issues – we got this volunteer – they are ours
 - Employees who volunteer on a data base to avoid duplication
 - Cost of background checks is high
 - Some agencies use an “affirmation” process, others use notarized process
 - Risk management training for cohesion - might be policy review, not training
 - Need general or standard guidelines for agencies to use

Solutions

- Contract for/centralize background checks
- Contract for volunteer management software
- Use social media solutions for marketing
- Use Coopers Notification - they provide CEAN for county
- Check out SAMARITIAN model for Parks Authority
- County Face book needs volunteer reference
- Use listserves for privacy policy on sharing for basis of county policy
- Place online training on web for volunteer training. See Med Res Corps www.vatrain.org
- Figure out a way to share Volunteer Management information to avoid trying to meet